UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.599
24 January 2000

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 599th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 18 January 2000, at noon

Chairperson: Mrs. OUEDRAOGO

CONTENTS

THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE: DISCUSSION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.00-40384 (E)

The meeting was called to order at noon

THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE: DISCUSSION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed Ms. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and said that the Committee appreciated the opportunity to discuss with the High Commissioner recent and future developments in human rights in the context of the United Nations system.

2. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) congratulated Mrs. Ouedraogo on her election as Chairperson of the Committee and welcomed Mrs. Rilantono as the Committee's newest member. She looked forward to discussing ways in which the Committee might contribute to the forthcoming Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

3. She commended the Committee for its efforts to reduce the backlog of reports, which had required significant changes in its working methods. Its decision to begin preparing general comments was also a welcome development. Since her discussion with the Committee at its twenty-first session, she had been able to mobilize resources for that purpose through the generosity of the Hilton Foundation. In preparing its general comments the Committee would also have the full support of the staff of the High Commissioner's Office, particularly within the context of the Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4. She thanked the Chairperson of the Committee for her participation in the technical assistance mission to Haiti in December 1999 under the Plan of Action, with cooperation from the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Civilian Mission in Haiti. The mission had reinforced the determination of the Government of Haiti to give renewed effort and attention to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Haiti.

5. Donor support for the Plan of Action had enabled her Office to provide the Committee with additional Secretariat support. She had requested donors to extend their support for the Convention and the Committee, within the framework of the Annual Appeal 2000, and she hoped that the Committee would support her drive to raise the funds needed to finance activities in that area.

6. Racism, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance were at the root of many of the world's recent and more cruel conflicts. Children were among those who suffered most severely the consequences of ethnic discrimination and were also the most innocent victims of the conflicts it provoked. Children held the key to changing the future. If children could be freed from discrimination, as called for in article 2 of the Convention, the greatest possible contribution would have been made to the prevention of human rights abuses of any other type, as the children of today were the adults of tomorrow. The forthcoming World Conference, to be

held in August 2001 in South Africa, was intended to provide the international community with an opportunity to find a new vision for the new century, to review its thinking and to renew its commitment to the total eradication of racism.

7. However, the success of the Conference depended on the full support of all the key actors. The Commission on Human Rights, in resolution 1999/78, and the General Assembly, in resolution 54/154, had called for the preparatory process to involve representatives of all United Nations human rights mechanisms, and other treaty bodies were already considering the form their contributions would take. The Committee's work and experience would provide a strong basis for exploring the relationship between racial discrimination and obstacles to children's enjoyment of their human rights. Two of the seven objectives defined for the Conference, relating to implementation of existing instruments and recommendations for action-oriented measures to combat racism, were areas in which the Committee on the Rights of the Child might make a valuable contribution.

8. The open-ended sessional working group of the Commission on Human Rights had highlighted the effective role that education could play in promoting the participation of racially disadvantaged groups in society, the impact of discrimination in its various forms and the particular vulnerability of those who were subjected to discrimination on grounds of both gender and ethnicity. The plight of girls in that regard should be of particular concern.

9. It was clear that there were many possible areas relating to the Conference where child rights would be of significance. She would welcome suggestions from the Committee as to its possible role in helping to prepare the Conference and any assistance that her Office might provide in that regard.

10. Mr. FULCI said that through his experience in other forums he had come to admire the High Commissioner's extensive work and courage in the face of many challenges and difficulties. The Committee had found itself in the unfortunate position of having an average of 50 initial and second periodic reports to consider annually. However, it was unable to tackle more than 24 reports per year, which had set it back two years and had also undermined its credibility.

11. As President of the Economic and Social Council, he intended to bring the matter to the attention of Foreign Ministers. The situation called for amendment of article 43 of the Convention to increase the membership of the Committee to 18, which would require acceptance of the amendment by 120 States parties by 2001, ahead of the Committee's next elections. The Committee would therefore appreciate any efforts which the High Commissioner might make to expedite the process by urging the 49 States which had not yet accepted the amendment to do so.

12. The Committee welcomed the provision of additional Secretariat support, and particularly appreciated the excellent work of the Committee's Secretary. He pointed out that the Committee had not been able to begin preparing general comments because of its heavy workload. With regard to the High Commissioner's request for the Committee to participate in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, he urged her to consider the fact that, in addition to the backlog with which Committee members had to contend they had outside commitments too.

13. Mrs. RILANTONO endorsed the High Commissioner's comments about children being society's future. Psychosocial changes had a significant impact on children's lives and should be taken into account in their holistic development.

14. Certain communities were unfortunately marginalized by both discrimination and the rapid technological advances of the modern world. An important way of combating such marginalization was to contribute to children's personality development, teach them social tolerance and ensure their right to education, as set forth in articles 28 and 29 of the Convention.

15. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that the High Commissioner's visits always brought with them good news and new ideas. She welcomed the financial support which had been promised for the drafting of the general comments and for the Plan of Action. The World Conference against Racism was an important initiative which provided a new opportunity to reframe the debate on racism and discrimination in the light of political and other changes in the world.

16. She wished to underscore the possible global impact and holistic and multisectoral effects of the Conference on children's lives. It was vital for the Committee to participate in all phases of preparation for the Conference, in particular by focusing on education and preventive strategies.

17. With regard to the Committee's contribution, the Conference should be placed on the Committee's agenda, especially in view of the forthcoming five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing + 5) and the importance of girl-child issues. The Committee might begin by intensifying its discussions with States parties on article 2 of the Convention, which was one of the basic principles of the Convention to which all the others were linked, and by furnishing concrete solutions to related problems, including the drafting of country-specific recommendations. The Committee might also make a worthwhile contribution to the study on the effects of racial discrimination on the children of members of minorities, in particular those of migrant workers requested by the General Assembly. She asked whether dates for regional preparatory meetings for the World Conference against Racism had been set, and said she trusted that the High Commissioner would keep the Committee informed of further developments.

18. Mr. DOEK said he considered Mr. Fulci's concerns to constitute an extra challenge to the Committee to step up its efforts. There was evidence that the more aware children became of the adult world, the more intolerant they became. While the Committee would, of course, represent them at the World Conference against Racism, he wondered whether there were any plans to invite children to attend. He drew attention to the need for a treaty-body coordination mechanism to avoid duplication and optimize input. The Committee might also produce a compilation of its work on non-discrimination issues. A general comment on article 2 might be a heavy task in view of the time constraints the Committee was facing. However, as delegations invariably emphasized the importance of education in changing society's attitude to ethnic minorities and foreigners, the Committee might prepare a general comment on article 29 of the Convention, concerning the content of education, providing concrete examples of human rights education in various countries.

19. Mr. RABAH asked what role the High Commissioner envisaged for the Committee in combating racism and related intolerance. Were there contributions it might make, apart from its recommendations to the delegations of States parties?

20. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) expressed her appreciation not only of Committee members' suggestions, but of their sense of commitment to the World Conference against Racism. She was aware of members' workload and outside commitments, as referred to by Mr. Fulci, and thanked them for making additional efforts to participate actively in the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1999. She hoped Mr. Fulci would use his good offices, as President of the Economic and Social Council to seek support for the increase in the Committee's membership and greater Secretariat assistance as proposed in the Plan of Action.

21. The Committee's involvement in the World Conference would exemplify the significant role played by the treaty bodies. The Committee's contribution might highlight the importance of the holistic development of the child, emphasized by Mrs. Rilantono, as many children were born into situations of deprivation, discrimination and intolerance. She had already taken steps to implement Mrs. Sardenberg's suggestion that the holistic approach to children's development should be linked to the "Beijing + 5" meeting. It was essential for the Committee to intensify its discussion of article 2, possibly through a general comment, as Mr. Doek had suggested. Given the Committee's time constraints, the Secretariat might assist in gathering material.

22. In reply to Mr. Doek's question concerning a coordination mechanism, she said that the chairpersons of all the treaty bodies would meet to determine their respective approaches, thereby enhancing their overall impact. The Committee might contribute by stressing the importance of children in the context of xenophobia and racism. While she endorsed Mr Doek's suggestion that children should be invited to participate in the Conference, she was not in a position to guarantee it. The experiment had not been entirely successful during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention, at which the Committee had learned the hard way that children needed to be listened to in a particular manner. She could, however, suggest that States parties should include children, who were often victims of xenophobia and racism, in their delegations.

23. The treaty bodies must seize the opportunity of the World Conference against Racism to launch a vibrant, worldwide protest against that particular evil which, far from abating, was manifesting itself in new ways in many countries. While active discussions were under way, it was too early to say when the regional preparatory meetings would begin.

24. Mrs. KARP said that, given the consensus that education was a vital tool for the eradication of the phenomena the Conference would address, the Office of the High Commissioner might contribute to reflection on the application of technical assistance for human rights to practical problems. What was important was not the teaching of human rights per se, but the methodology used in preparing teachers for the task. Messages and slogans did not apprise the public of daily human rights violations, of which racial discrimination was a constant.

25. Mr. FULCI asked what concrete action the High Commissioner would recommend with regard to poverty eradication, an area that lent itself to specific measures. He wondered whether one such measure would be not only to alleviate some countries' debt, but also to invest in children the funds thus released?

26. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked whether the World Conference against Racism would have the same format as its predecessor, whether it would result in a declaration, and what means would be used to involve the private sector and the media.

27. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said she agreed with Mrs. Karp about the need for participation and empowerment as an important element of human rights education and welcomed Mr. Doek's suggestion of a general comment on article 2 of the Convention. In regional conferences her Office focused on comparing approaches to human rights education, and it had issued a manual for teachers. The Committee could perhaps contribute to the ongoing efforts of her Office to improve the manual's quality. She firmly supported Mr. Fulci's idea that debt-relief funds should be invested in children

28. Replying to Mrs. Sardenberg, she said the World Conference against Racism would produce a declaration and a plan of action; the Committee might wish to help her Office determine the shape of that declaration. One day of the Conference, 1 September 2001, had already been set aside for statements by non-governmental organizations, and measures were in place to harness media cooperation. She welcomed the suggestion that States parties should be requested to include children in their delegations. She trusted that the Chairperson would make a contribution to the meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies.

29. The CHAIRPERSON observed that the High Commissioner, as Secretary-General of the World Conference against Racism, had taken note of the Committee members' views. The Committee would continue to discuss the content of its contribution and would decide on the precise theme of its general comment on article 2. It looked forward to further discussion of new approaches with the High Commissioner.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.